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Subject: True Knowledge of God.

PLYMOUTH PULPIT:

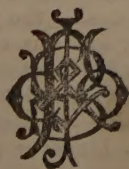
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HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God."—EPH. iii. 17-19.

The sacred Scriptures teach us, from beginning to end, the existence of a personal God, of such a nature that we may draw from ourselves a true—although it be a partial and diminished—idea of God. We are taught that there is one supreme God: although existing in three Persons, yet one God. And we are taught that this is not diffused, latent, universal being, but that it is being in the same sense in which we comprehend it among ourselves. We are taught that it is a present God, as separated from all other existences, and as made up of intelligence, and will, and emotion, somewhat after the manner of ourselves. That is, we are so far like God, that we can form some conception of the mode of divine existence from our own—though not all of it, nor the highest part, nor the best.

The Scriptures make emphatic declaration of certain great moral constituent qualities which inhere in the nature of God, and which constitute its supreme glory and beauty and desirableness. Central among these is the great quality of goodness, or benevolence, or love, whichever term you may choose to designate it by; and from this central, this mother element of the divine nature proceed all other qualities. That is to say, they are enwrapped in this supreme goodness, and take their quality and direction and use and nature from it. So that justice, and patience, and wisdom, and righteousness, and all other qualities of this kind, are products or inflections of the one great central divine element of Benevolence or Love.

Emphatically, however, the Scriptures declare that man can attain, in searching for this great Father God, to but glimpses—to

only partial views. We are nowhere encouraged, in the Bible, to suppose that we can know God as we know each other. Although our knowledge of each other is very partial, yet it is comparatively rounded out; and we know each other in such a way that we separate one from another. We analyze, we discriminate, we individualize, through long ranges; and the knowledge which we have of men is sufficient for all the purposes of business or of pleasure—for all purposes of intercourse.

Now, there is in the Scriptures no holding up to our conception such a knowledge as this of God. When Moses asked that he might have a knowledge of God, in order that he might lead and instruct the people, he was told that it was impossible that any one should see the fullness of God and live. Only a part of God was to be disclosed to him, and that not the highest part.

“And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.”

This great revelation of God as loving that which is good and right, and wrapping it round about with infinite patience and forbearance, was a disclosure made to Moses. And it was not a complete disclosure. It was called merely a side view, and not a full face. “Canst thou, by searching,” it is boldly asked, “find out God? or understand the Almighty unto perfection?” The whole book of Job turns on that very idea of the impossibility of man’s compassing by his reason the whole nature of God, or his providences, and the meanings of them. And Paul, the most rapt of all the apostles, declares that our knowledge of the other life, and of its contents, compares with the reality very much as a child’s dreams about manhood compare with the realization of manhood when one has grown up. He says distinctly, “Now we see through a glass darkly.” He taught that the future was dim and imperfect as seen by us here.

The arrogance with which men have taught the precise limits of everything in God; the intolerable cruelty with which men have insisted that the government of God should be exactly so defined, and that the administration of that government should be precisely so believed, and that the nature of God should be exactly so accepted, is in wonderful contrast with these majesties of Scripture which declare that we may know God for comfort, for strength, for wisdom, for guidance, and for final salvation; but as to our knowing him in any degree which is commensurate with the qualities of his being, that is impossible. He transcends all human capacity.

The reason why God is not revealed to us perfectly is simply this, that the faculties of men limit the disclosures which are made to them. You cannot make any disclosure to a man for which he has not a faculty. Whatever quality or attribute lies beyond and outside of the faculties which are in a man, cannot be revealed to him. Nor can we go beyond a certain amount of comprehending power in conceiving of quantity. Neither can we go beyond certain experiences in conceiving of quality. A knowledge of these things turns on what we are ourselves.

Tyndall has shown in his lectures which have been delivered so often, happily for us, and are being delivered again in this city, that the beams of light which come from the sun contain a great deal more than our eyes can detect; and that when we come to measure the scale, there is unquestionable evidence that there are beams in the light of the sun which lie outside of any power yet in our eye to catch and determine them. He, moreover, hints that the Darwinian epoch may yet come, when the eye will develop itself up to the power of catching those as yet uncatchable rays.

You cannot, by the senses, understand anything that does not lie within the scope of their power. Imagine a man that had but one sense, and that the sense of seeing. What could he know, by putting a trumpet to the eye, of the sound of that trumpet? Imagine a man that had no eyes, but only ears. What could he know in respect to microscopy or telescropy, or any instrument of vision? The ear cannot be made to answer the purposes of seeing. All the truth which comes through the ear must lie within the bounds of that sense; and all the truth which comes through the eye must lie within the bounds of that sense.

It is not to be supposed that our five, or seventeen, senses—whatever the number may be which we have—comprise the extent of the universe in respect to all matters. It is not to be supposed that we are the highest range of beings that are in existence. And if there are to be added one, two, three, four, five more faculties, and there are things the knowledge of which is to come naturally through those faculties, we cannot understand those things now, because we have not the senses, we have not the door, the portal, the window, through which they are made known.

Now, that which is true of our physical senses, and which we recognize as true, and which enters, as an axiom, into philosophy, is also true of faculty—for there are faculties just as surely as there are senses. There is something behind the eye, and something inside of the ear, which we call mind. Whether it be matter, or whether it be spirit, it is there, in its own proper nature and func-

tion. And the same law which obtains in regard to our senses obtains in regard to the mind. You cannot interpret to a man a quality the faculty for comprehending which is wanting in him, or is dead in him. We recognize that in every-day life. It is impossible for some men to understand each other. If you were to select a man of great purity, and great gentleness, and great kindness, and great benevolence, and great goodness, and great nobleness of nature; if you were to take a model man, and bring a savage, hot from Africa, into his presence, do you suppose that anything but a miracle could strike a knowledge of this high man into that low man? Most certainly not. And why? Because he has not himself the quality by which those things which exist in the other man can be understood. For when we say "Love," it does not mean anything to a man who has never had love, any more than if you said some other unintelligible thing. When I say "Love," if you have felt it, you know what I mean, and if you have not, you do not know what I mean. When I say "Courage," if you have had courage, you know what I mean; but if you have not, you do not know what I mean.

A man has in him what may be compared to the chords of a musical instrument. Only such sounds can be produced on a musical instrument as its chords are adapted to produce. You cannot understand anything which has not been, in some form, and in some degree, a matter of experience in you. So that it is true that men are outside of each other. Men who live in their basilar, animal faculties, having all their moral sensibilities dormant, cannot understand men who live in their spiritual and supersensual nature.

Take a man who owns a dog-pit in New York. All his pride is centered in black-and-tan terriers or bull-pups; and his idea of sport and of life consists in the breed of some dog that he has, and in the pluck that is in him, and in the number of rats that he can kill in a minute. He talks all day and all the evening about these things. It is his joy and pleasure and pride to win; and when the dirty, nasty contest comes on, nothing thrills him with such ecstasy. Now, take Mr. Bergh and that man, and put them together, what a nice time they would have! Do you suppose they could understand each other? There is an absolute incompatibility between two such natures. I might multiply instances, but one is enough.

Men, therefore, who give their whole life to the production of suffering, are not able to understand men who give their whole life to the assuaging of suffering and the making of happiness. In

other words, we understand each other by likeness of tastes, or by the rebound in you of something in me which tells you what I am. If there is no rebound, there is no use of interpretation. You cannot cipher me out, as you would cipher out a sum. A mother could not understand her child if there was not something of the mother in the child. There is the yeast of one man in another, or else there could not be raised in him a conception of that other. Such is the law by which we are governed in comprehending each other's nature or experience.

One step more. When we examine the operation of men's higher faculties—those which are furthest from physical life; those which are latest developed; those which have appeared in the race latest; those which we call the product of civilization and religion—when we examine the operation of these higher faculties, we perceive the presence of a different law of evidence from that which prevails in regard to the lower faculties. When we undertake to judge of the qualities of matter, and bring our lower and physical faculties to bear upon them, there are certain processes by which we evidence facts or existences to ourselves; but when we apply the other part of our mind—our higher faculties—to knowledge of other kinds of truth, we are conscious that they act under a different law, or in accordance with a different state of facts.

For example, if you wish to know how many marbles there are in a peck measure, you can sort them out and count them. You can separate them, and estimate their number. Wishing to know the contents of that peck measure, you count out a thousand marbles, and you say that there are so many. And you have found out that fact by the application of a physical faculty—the sense of number. But suppose a man should put in your hand a music-book, and ask you to give an opinion of the music in it, could you count it? Is it the province of arithmetic to interpret music? You are conscious that another faculty comes to you when you undertake to judge of music; and the moment you are asked what the music in that book is, you say, "I must hear it before I can answer your question." It is not music to you until you hear it; and when you hear, it is not music to you by any process of reasoning. You cannot tell why it is music to you. A person at the piano strikes one set of chords, and they give forth a certain sound, and you say, "Don't!" Why do you say so? For no reason except that it does not agree with you. It hurts you. But another set of chords, struck, produce a sound which is sweet and agreeable to you. When some tunes are played your whole soul goes out to them. Music has a faculty of its own. That faculty knows by

intuition what is music, and accepts it. There are many people who have this faculty in low measure, and recognize the smallest kind of tunes, which have little of music in them, but much of sentiment. The words help them to like the tune. And as you go up so that you touch the faculty of music in its productive element, you see that that faculty acts by a different law of nature from that by which the processes of arithmetic are carried on, or from that by which solid qualities of matter are separated, are analyzed, are determined.

It is a standing jest, that some person read Milton's *Paradise Lost* to a mathematician, who said, "Well, what does it prove?" As if the best poetry had to prove something! As if it appealed to the reasoning faculties! As if it did not go above men, and behind them, into another court!

Snapping cloth as they do in stores, is, I suppose, a good test; for I see that they always do it. They put a piece of cloth on the counter, and snap it; and I snap it, too; but I never know what it is for—though to those that are expert I suppose it is a test of the quality of the goods. But suppose you should go into a crockery shop and apply the same test? It is wise enough in judging of cloth; but how foolish it would be in judging of fragile commodities!

All through life we apply different modes of evidence; and when we come to the truth, we come to it in different ways. Matters of mirth are not to be determined by the reason. Matters of beauty are not to be determined by the physical senses. The physical senses may be the portals through which an apprehension of beauty comes; but a mental condition, a feeling, is subject to a law of its own, independent of any rational faculty, or any power of rationation.

I do not undertake to say that the property in human faculties of discerning the truth which belongs to each faculty, is perfect; that it is always reliable; that it needs no auxiliary; that it ought not to be analyzed and played around about by the reason; but this I say: that every single one of the faculties, to a greater degree as you ascend in the scale, has a certain intuition which belongs to its sphere. It is called *intuition*, for the want of a better name. There is an intuition in all the faculties of men's minds if they exist in full natural power. They have a spontaneity which can be excited by powerful stimulants in those who have it lowest and least. It is there, no matter how undeveloped the man may be—this inherent power by which, more or less clearly, it is able to determine the things which belong to it.

It is by this interior force that men recognize moral qualities in each other, which are invisible. No man sees justice. He may see actions which justice produces, but he does not see the thing itself. The cause which excites the actions exists independent of those actions. We see actions which men call generous; but the sense or feeling of generosity lies back of the actions. Delicacy, frankness, love, wisdom—these are invisible things. The actions which they inspire may be visible, but the qualities are invisible. We judge of them, we have an intuition of them, because they answer to certain corresponding qualities in our own selves.

Now reach our text-truth, at last:

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge [lower knowledge—intellectual, physical knowledge], that ye may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

We come to a knowledge of Christ by shaping ourselves into his nature. We do not come to know Christ by gathering together arguments from physical science, nor by grouping texts out of the written word of God: we come to a knowledge of Christ by a personal experience of those qualities which inhere in him, and which, in power, constitute his divinity. He who has in himself a moral quality which corresponds to that which is in Jesus Christ, and has great sensibility in it, will have a knowledge of Jesus Christ, of God in Christ, or of the Eternal Father, as the case may be. He will have in himself a knowledge which he cannot have by any external process of reasoning. The sensibility of a corresponding nature is a true interpretation, and is the highest argument possible, under such circumstances. It is so much of us as is godlike that gives us the evidence of God. A moral state carried up to a certain degree of intensity will develop evidence and power in the direction of truths of its own kind. And he who is, like Christ, built up in love—built vertically, built laterally, built all round; he whose nature it is to dwell centrally in this great, enriching, all-controlling element and power of love, will have brought into his mind a realization of the existence of God, and of the power of God's nature as a Being of love, which will be overwhelming and all-satisfying; which you cannot get from science, because science does not touch it; and which you cannot get from mere reasoning, because reasoning does not reach to it.

We may help ourselves by reasoning, and we may gain analogies by science; if we turn to the natural world we may find there evidence of the existence of God, so far as divine quality is represented by power and matter; but when we rise to the moral

and personal elements of the divine character, nature has nothing in it which can explain them to us—unless we be nature; and we are. There is nothing in nature, aside from man, out of which we can develop these attributes of the divine Being. We can apprehend them only by having in us moral qualities which correspond to them, and by having them as sensitive to the Divine presence as the thermometer is to the presence of heat, or as the barometer is to the pressure of the atmosphere, or to the presence of moisture in it. These qualities—heat and moisture—are indicated to us by certain instruments; and here is an instrument, the soul of man, existing in the power of a true regenerated love; and this is that which detects the presence, and is inspired by the touch, of the Divine nature, and bears witness to it. It is said that God bears witness in us; but not a whit more than we bear witness to his presence.

I sat last summer sometimes for hours in the dreamy air of the mountains, and saw, over against the Twin Mountain House, the American aspen, of which the forests there are full. I saw all the coqueties and blinkings of that wonderful little tree—the witch, the fairy-tree, of the forest. As I sat there, when there was not a cloud moving, when there was not a ripple on the glassy surface of the river, when there was not a grain of dust lifted, when everything was still—dead still—right over against me was that aspen tree; and there was one little leaf quivering and dancing on it. It was so nicely poised on its long, slender stem that it knew when the air moved. Though I did not know it, though the dust did not know it, and though the clouds did not know it, that leaf knew it; and it quivered and danced, as much as to say, “O wind! you can’t fool me.” It detected the motion of the air when nothing else could.

Now, it only requires sensibility in us to detect physical qualities, if we have the corresponding qualities; or social elements, if we have the corresponding elements; or moral attributes, if we have the corresponding attributes. We detect all qualities by the sensibility in us of corresponding qualities which reveal them to us. And he who has largely the divine element will be able to recognize the divine existence. That element in him is the power by which he is brought to a knowledge of God. And it is a fool that says in his heart, “There is no God.”

If this be a true doctrine, we understand why it is that we know so little of God in this world. “Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself,” is the interpolation which is found in one part of Scripture.

We wonder why God does not come to us, and speak to us; and I have no doubt, if worms can think, that there are just such thoughts in them. If they saw me going over my garden, they might reason about me as you have sometimes reasoned about the great Master of all. The worm might say, "If there is a real intelligent being above me, such as it is rumored there is among worms, why don't he make himself known to me?" But what have I that I could tell a worm? Suppose I should read to him the Ten Commandments; or suppose I should describe to him a railroad, would he understand me? Would these things be any more to him than so much water on the back of a goose that rolls off as quick as it touches? Suppose I should undertake to tell him about my household; about the love that exists there; about the commonwealth; about justice; about heroism, or anything of that kind? What sort of a time would I have if you were all worms, and I were preaching to you? What could I do to make you comprehend? I should stand outside of you. You would be so small that I could not get into you. There would be nothing in you which would correspond to that which is in me. There would be no vibrating nerve in you on which I could play.

Give me a harp supplied with strings, and let me sweep my hand over them, and I can produce sounds; but if I take a harp that has no strings, and sweep my hand through the void, no sounds will flow forth.

If God be what we suppose him to be, the All-Father, filling the heavens, and transcending all other beings in majesty and power and goodness; and if we are going up toward him gradually, rising from a low state, from point to point, and understanding him according to our unfolding, and only so; if the infinite horizon of his nature is far above us; if our sense of delicacy, our sense of sympathy, our sense of love, our sense of justice, and our sense of goodness are merely alphabetic; and if God's being fulfills the grand suggestions of moral quality that are in us, unrolling them, and carrying them up and out into vast and infinite degrees, then how little do we understand of God's nature! and how little can we understand of it! When we have been lifted heavenward by the most mighty inspirations; when we are conscious of heroism in men; when we know what it is to be willing to die for a child or a friend, how short a distance have we gone toward reaching a comprehension of that Being whose power is incomprehensible, and whose ways are past finding out! It is true that we can learn some things concerning him; but these things are but beginnings of a knowledge of him.

What does a child that has just learned his alphabet, and says, "I can spell a-b ab," know about literature? What does he know of that which goes on in the mind of a scholar? And yet, we are farther away from a knowledge of the divine nature than such a child is from a knowledge of the profoundest scholar that ever lived.

How then shall we, that are filled with selfishness, and pride, and ten thousand lower animal inclinations, from which we have not shaken ourselves free—how shall we enter into sympathy with the vast orb and realm of brightness that inheres in God! Is it strange that God does not reveal himself to us? It is impossible that he should, on account of our condition; on account of the quality of our being; on account of our smallness.

In view of this exposition, I remark, first, that the attempt to prove a God by scientific tests, applying physics strictly, can only reach a small way up. There is an argument that can be constructed that will satisfy—those that it will satisfy; but it is only a little way that it can go. And as I do not think that men can, by scientific observation, test and determine that which lies outside of all physics, so neither do I think this failure need lead to the skepticisms which some men make, but which, thank God, the most eminent scientific men do not make, who are many of them reverent, and who are all of them, I believe, seekers after the truth. The greatest physicists of the day are men who want to know the truth, not only as it is related to matter and to men, but as it is related to divinity.

But that makes no difference. You cannot prove nor disprove by matter that which lies beyond matter; and if, through all the material universe, there is no sign nor hint of God, it does not make any difference in the truth of his spiritual existence.

Secondly, the difficulties which beset the existence of God, as a personal Being, of intellect, of emotion, and of will—a transcendent and glorified man (for that is as near as we can come to it)—these difficulties are not alleviated when we turn in other directions. I am speaking in an age which runs strongly in the line of skepticism as to the existence of God. Because men have not seen him, and cannot apply to him the same tests that they apply to matter, there is a strong drifting towards atheism. I see no alleviation in that direction. That we exist, that nature exists, that there is an infinite chain of cause and effect, that it has had a past history, and that it is to have a future history, we cannot deny. We cannot deny that the vast universe is a fact, except by shutting our eyes,

You meet the same difficulties in the realm of sense. When you say that matter is eternal, you do not help anything. It is useless to attempt to stop the thought by a word. You do not stop the thought at all. We go back on it. It is more difficult for me, a thousand times, to conceive that there is in the universe a self-ordering nature, than it is to conceive of a personal God who takes care of the universe, as we take care of an estate, or of a kingdom.

Neither do I find any relief in turning to the poets. There is no relief for me in atheism, or pantheism, or in the idea that the sum total of the universe, and that all causes and effects, are God; that the whole physical creation is the body of God; that all the intelligence diffused through all creatures is the intelligence of God; that matter and mind as they exist distributed through the universe, are only another name for God. By adopting this theory we may run away from some grievous difficulties; but we run into as many others that are no less grievous. I would rather shut my eyes and give up trying to understand my God, than undertake to trace him partly in myself, partly in you, partly in the laws of matter, and partly in the laws of mind. In such a diffused thought of God there is no relief to me from the difficulties which inhere in this subject.

The prime trouble is that we are not large enough to understand God on any theory. It is our smallness that makes the difficulty. There are no more difficulties surrounding the doctrine of a personal God than there are surrounding the atheistic or pantheistic view. Indeed, it is more rational, and so more easily interpreted.

And, what is more, the moral sensibility by which men may interpret the existence of a being like God is a better evidence to them, so far as they make use of it, than the sensibility of the eye, by which they interpret the existence of physical things; than the sensibility of the ear, by which they interpret the existence of that which appeals to the sense of hearing; or than the sensibility of the hand, by which they interpret the existence of things which they touch.

I know music as well as though I could put the carpenter's rule on it, though I cannot subject it to any such measurement. I know warmth, though I cannot see it. I judge of it by other senses than that of sight. I know what heroism is, though I cannot test it in any of those ways in which I test lower physical qualities. I know when I am in the presence of a great nature, by the effect produced upon me by that nature, overflowing me

with his influence, and stimulating me. Yea, though the man speak not, I feel the power of his being.

And a corresponding experience to this, is that by which men know that God is; by which they know that there is a glorious Centre of warmth, and light, and power, and love, and truth, and justice. All that which came latest in the development of the race. All that which come as the fruit of civilization, and, more properly, of religion; all that which works away from brute force, from selfishness, from self-depending pride, and which aspires toward a nobler future manhood—all that, it is, that calls out for God, and says, "There is a God—*there is a God!*"

Although this is an argument that is not satisfactory to lower natures, it is an argument that is absolute and conclusive to higher natures. The soul is its own best witness, in its sensibility, and in its yearnings after the reality of a Being that is improving it with his own qualities.

Do you suppose that the day swelters, and that there is no sun which is breeding heat? Do you suppose that the night is dark, and that there is no withdrawal of that which gives the light of the day? And if this principle is true when applied to our lower nature, how much more is it true when applied to our higher nature!

Now, if you take the New Testament, you will be struck, all the way through, with the style of evidence of the existence and presence of God which it insists upon. There are no arguments given in it to prove the divine existence. When Christ was in habitual controversy in Jerusalem, with the educated men of his nation, and they said to him, "If you are divine, make it manifest to us—show us some sign by which we shall know it," his reply was, "You are not able to judge of that which is divine. You have not that nature which is necessary to enable one to do it. But if you were sensitive to that which is good and true, you would *feel* that I am divine. The fact that you do not feel it indicates a deadness in your condition. It is a sign that you lack that by which alone one can determine what is divine, and beautiful, and just, and true."

And the apostles, from beginning to end, taught their disciples that they must grow in grace if they would grow in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Here, in the text which we have selected, the grand highway toward knowledge is represented to be that God "would grant you, according to the richness of his glory, to be strengthened by might by his Spirit in the inner man"—not in this outer man; not in this animal body; not in these

basilar instincts; not in these lower forms of physical reasoning; but in that man which is within. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts"—not in your convictions—"by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fullness of God."

In the court of the human soul stand two advocates. Pride, when the heavens are opened, looks in, and says, "No God—no God;" and Selfishness declares, when the record is opened, "No evidence of a God;" but once let the bright inspiration of the Divine Spirit wake in the soul of man the rapture of Love, and all the generousities which cluster around about it, and then let the record be opened, and, like Thomas of old, Love lifts up its hands with outcry, and says, "My Lord, and my God!"

Whatever in you is pure; whatever in you is just; whatever in you is sweet-minded; whatever in you has patience in suffering for others; whatever in you reaches out toward the magnitude and heroism of the divine character, as made known in the Lord Jesus Christ—this refuses to disbelieve that there is a God; but whatever in you is low, and carnal, and fleshly, and of the earth, is earthy—that it is which treads evidence under foot, and says, "There is no God."

Listen in yourselves to that which is best. Listen to that which is divinest. There is a God blazing afar off, and creating days that need no sun. There is a God that is apprehended, not by means of physical senses, but by means of qualities which correspond to his. There is a Spirit of central love that is working through the universe to subdue all things to its power. Toward that great glowing tropical Center all things tend, slowly, yet surely; and that grand Love which carries in its bosom rectitude, and justice and truth, shall triumph over the physical, shall overcome the material, and shall create out of matter the royalty of mind, out of mind the royalty of spirit, and out of spirit the royalty of sonship in the heavenly land.

To that God we yield our obedience. Up to him we send our feeble cries, which he may interpret according to the greatness of his wisdom. In his service we undertake to live by following the qualities which inhere in him. It is this Lord and God who is represented to us in the form of the Lord Jesus Christ, that we call our Master. By him we are redeemed with a daily and everlasting redemption. We love him; we trust him; we follow him; we live in him; we die in him; and we will reign with him.

We are permitted, to-day, to renew our pledges of fealty, by this external rite,* which has in it something that comforts us, and stays us, and helps us, and will so long as we remain in the flesh.

After the blessing is pronounced, all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ, and desire to live in obedience to him, are affectionately invited to remain and partake of these memorials, which celebrate his love for us.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.†

O THOU that art above our thought, how poor, to thee, is every word which we speak! How unwise and how foolish are we to thee, before whom angels are charged with folly, and whose being transcends ours immeasurably! How small we are! and how far from thee! Neither do we know of anything that could bring us into relation with thee but love, which searches all things; which is universal and infinite; which looks to the least, and the poorest, and the most needy; which draws all things toward infinite fullness and bounteous supply.

We come, then, asking that love may interpret our want. We are filled with all the fruit of ignorance. We spring from beneath, and work steadfastly toward the light, but are children of darkness until we meet the beams that come from thee. We begin with selfishness in every part of us, and do not know how to carry ourselves unselfishly till the divine principle of love is planted in us. And even then, how unapt are we as scholars! And how unskillful are we in waging war against all that tends to beat us down to the earth! How ignorant are we of the best ways! How we vibrate from side to side of painful experiences! How many things we do that we would not do again! How many things we think that afterward we learn that we should not think! How many things we feel, the experience of which teaches us that they are not right! How every one of us can learn no lesson from any book, nor from any life, but only from the round of his own solitary life and thought, that beat about here and there! As birds before mighty winds are driven headlong, not as they would, but in spite of themselves, so often are we driven.

We thank thee, O thou most merciful God, that thou art in sympathy with all the race that thou hast brought forth, and art nourishing it. We rejoice that thou knowest its faith, its history, and all its experiences, and that there is in thee that which corresponds to the wants of thy creatures, so that thou art all in all. It is this bounty of God, it is this grandeur of its expenditure and adaptation to all the realms of the universe, that, whenever we shall know what it is, and see thee as thou art, will make thee so glorious.

Now, because we are but moles and bats, we cannot understand thee. Now, because we are so unlike thee, there is but little in us which interprets thee to us. Now, we are winter, and thou art summer. Now, we are dark and moveless, and thou art light and activity. We rejoice to believe that we are going on; that the days and hours are bringing us nearer and nearer

* The administration of the Lord's Supper.

† Immediately preceding the admission of members into the church.

to thee; that we shall, ere long, cross the border; and that the places which knew us shall know us no more forever. The sorrows, the sins, the griefs, all the mighty throes, of earthly life, shall be left behind, and we shall rise into that realm where there shall be no more sickness, nor pain, nor tears: where the everlasting Father shall bring us into the great family of the redeemed, and let us see him as he is. And we shall be like him.

Toward that consummation, with outstretched hands, at night, and in the clamors of the day, we press, seeking thee, and longing for thee—for thy strength; for thy goodness; for thy power. We are willing to wait. We are willing to serve. We are willing to bear the apprenticeship of this far-off and beginning life. We are willing to go through those steps which are necessary to learn how to disentangle ourselves from that which is physical and animal, and ripen toward that which is spiritual and divine. But all our hope is in thee. And O! if thou, blessed Spirit, art abroad, and art seeking to save the lost; if thou art our Guide and Enlightener, then, whatsoever path is opened before us, we will walk in patiently; and we will rejoice in troubles and afflictions and infirmities, so that they may work out in us immortality and glory by and by.

We pray that thou wilt look upon those who seem to themselves almost spent and overcome; who know not which way to turn; who see nothing, and hear nothing, and feel nothing; and who cry out after God, and are unsuccored. O Lord, abandon not any to despair. Let the light of peace be ministered to them according to their helplessness. And let those who are froward toward thee not find thee froward toward them. Let those who are heartbroken find thee dwelling with them. Give them rest and comfort.

And we pray, O Lord our God, that thou wilt grant thy blessing to those who are in doubt, and who know not which is the way of duty. Help them to interpret the right. Come thou, with thine enlightening Spirit, very near to those who are mourning over sins, and who are filled with compunctions for their transgressions. We beseech of thee to help them to cleanse their hearts, and to make such ample confession before thee that thou wilt forgive them, and speak peace to their troubled souls.

Grant thy blessing to rest upon all who are bearing the heat and burden of the day; who carry in their secular life the yoke, and every day draw the burden behind them. May they find that as their day is, so their strength shall be also. Be thou near to them, and guide them away from evil, and lead them into all that is right.

We pray that thou wilt more and more teach men to rise above their lower self, and into their higher and nobler self, where they shall have communion with God, and evidence of thy being.

We pray that thou wilt bless all that to-day have come near to thee for thy blessing. Make their hearts glad before thee; and may their lips speak thy praise.

Grant thy blessing to rest upon those who have come to acknowledge the fulfillment of thy promises; upon those who have made covenant with thee, that if thou wouldst spare them or those that were dear to them, they would serve thee, and have come with an inward purpose to ratify, before thee, and among thy people, that covenant; upon those in thy presence who rejoice with great gladness because evils have been averted, and because blessings which it seemed to them would never come have been showered upon them; and upon those who have seen the wave that threatened to overwhelm them pass away, and leave them safe. Hear, to-day, their thanksgiving. And if there be those who have been rescued from great outward loss, and whose fears have not come to pass, and who have come hither to thank God for his goodness in their prosperity, may their hearts

be attuned to thanksgiving indeed which shall be music to thee. If there be those who have returned from journeys, and have escaped from mighty tempests upon the sea, by which thou hast shown thy power, and if they stand in the sanctuary to-day and remember all their danger, and the great goodness of God to them and to theirs, hear their heart-felt thanksgiving, and listen to their joy and rejoicing. And we beseech of thee, O Lord our God, that if there are any that are of us but are not with us, and that cast feeble or wistful thoughts hitherward, and think of our joy in the sanctuary, and of their wretchedness at home, let some of the blessings that we are inheriting go to them. May that peace of God which passeth all understanding visit them.

We pray for thy blessing to rest upon all classes and conditions of men. May that spirit of love prevail out of which comes truth, and justice, and righteousness, and peace, and forbearance, and wisdom. May we learn to hold all qualities of excellence in love. May men learn more and more to help each other, and less and less to contend against each other. May we know how to cast down to the ground the animal that is in us, and how to exalt the angel, and bring forth in our living together more and more of that perfectness which is among the saints in glory.

We remember those who have gone before, and thank thee to-day for their faith, and patience, and victory. We remember our parents, our brothers and our sisters, that are removed from us. We remember our dear children that have gone. We remember friends and neighbors and laborers that have left their earthly heritage, and gone to glory. These are all of that company that calls out to us, to-day, saying, "Come." We hear them; we feel their grateful presence; we believe in their rest; we believe that we are not far from it; we rejoice in it; and we bless thee to-day for that great and triumphant church which rides above us in our militant and earthly condition.

Be pleased to bless all those that are to-day to be united to this church. Grant that this may not seem to them a sad and dreadful day, but that it may seem to them a day of great joy and gladness; a day of higher aspiration and nobler hope; a day of sympathy and helpfulness. May they see that the way of wisdom is not hard, though it be narrow, and at times steep. If it seems to them difficult, may they understand that the difficulty is only that which they have in climbing from that which is lower to that which is higher; from things worse to things better; from poverty to riches; from ignorance to knowledge; from selfishness to goodness. May they rejoice in that inspiration of God which has set them on their way to a higher and nobler life. And, with all watching and fidelity, may they become our brethren, and may we become their brethren, in the Lord. And we pray that thou wilt make this a day of Christian fellowship in the hearts of all thy people.

Spread abroad, we beseech of thee, throughout the world, the knowledge of thy word and the influence of thy Spirit. And may all the earth be filled with the light and the glory of God. And to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, shall be the praise evermore. *Amen.*

PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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